

Essential Tips for Traveling with Kids

The advice that makes family vacations approximately one million times easier

Does family travel intimidate the heck out of you? Have you ever gone on a trip when your child threw a very public tantrum? Or maybe you've never even tried a family vacation because you're scared your child will throw a very public tantrum.

I'm with you: I've 100% been there, too.

Now that I've gotten past my fear of traveling with kids—and have gone on to take them on uncountable road trips, plane rides, quick trips and international vacays—I want to help you leave your limitations in the dust.

Get ready: **Travel with kids is about to get a whole lot easier.**

1 Do less for more fun (and fewer meltdowns). Adults can pack a lot into a vacation, but kids need fewer destinations, attractions and plans in general. That's why as a rule, I plan no more than 2 activities per day. You might not hit everything on your must-see list, but your kids—and therefore you—will be a lot happier with the laid back itinerary.

2 Invest in saving time. A big motivator behind taking a family vacation is spending QT with your loved ones. So when you can, spend a little extra to save minutes and hassle. Have groceries delivered to your AirBnB. Fly direct. Park at the museum instead of the lot two miles away. Research shows that spending money on saving time makes people happier than spending on things, like souvenirs or a nice dinner.

3 Never let kids go hungry. You can spot veteran #travelmamas from across the terminal: They always have snacks galore. Why? Because when kids are hungry, they have no tolerance or patience for new things (aka everything in travel). I sometimes pre-feed my kids a snack before a meal. I find that if they're not starving, they're a lot less likely to throw a fit because the mac n cheese they ordered is too yellow.

4 Embrace feeling like a dork. When your family is on vacation, your kids love to see you let loose. So dance like nobody's watching (even if you're in the center of a crowd). Play tag. Try on funny clothes at the pioneer museum. You might feel silly, but your littles will remember how much fun you had together.

5 Ask, Says who? We have a whole lot of ideas about what's appropriate or acceptable—but sometimes it's best to evaluate if that rule is serving you on vacation. Case in point: When I took my kids to Mexico, one night we went down to the beach. They wanted me to take off my pants and join them wading in the waves. I told them, "I can't"—and then thought, Says who? My girls and I ended up splashing in the dark (yep, in our underwear), and they still talk about that night months and months later.

6 Get in the picture. If you take a vacation and don't show up in any of the photos, were you really there at all? Of course—but you and your kids will have a harder time locating you in those memories years from now. So take a group selfie, set up a portable tripod or ask a stranger to snap a pic of all of you together.

7 Ask open-ended questions. Research shows that travel sparks creativity and problem-solving, which makes a family vacation a terrific time to jolt yourselves out of a conversation rut. Pose thought-provoking or silly questions while you share a meal or at bedtime (my favorite: "What did you wonder about today?"). Just remember to jot them down—you won't ever want to forget your kids' answers.

8 Let them take pictures. My kiddos' cameras revolutionized our family trips. Now that they have their own (inexpensive, shatter-proof) cameras, they're engaged everywhere we go, from jungle hikes to art museums. They want to document everything they see!

9 Pack smarter. Don't know what, or how much, to pack? Yep, you and 99.9% of other moms. A couple rules of thumb: Don't pack tons of whatever you can buy in your destination (e.g. diapers). Pack fewer kids' clothes than you need (since you can do laundry, or at least sink-wash, clothes while you're there). And limit toys you bring to one quart-sized Ziplock. You can make anything fun—just ask my kids, who make puppets out of barf bags on the plane!

10 Hit up the grocery store. This tip is legit my favorite and one I use on every single darn trip. One of the first things we do when we arrive at our destination is go to a grocery store, where I stock up on easily portable snacks (see tip #3!), staples I know my kids will eat no matter what (Cheerios and peanut butter in my fam), ingredients we can throw together for a full meal (like deli meat, cheese, crackers and fruit) and premade food we can eat between activities (e.g. sandwiches and yogurt cups).

11 Welcome imperfection. Finally, the family travel advice that applies to pretty much every situation: Remind yourself that family travel is never perfect—and that it's still entirely worth it. Your kids might yell in the art museum, spill their dinner at a restaurant, cry on the plane or any number of other regular kid things. And that's ok. I guarantee your child is not the first who has done those things. (My kids have done all of the above—many, many times.)

Keep focused on what's really important: Spending quality time with your kids and making memories to last a lifetime.